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Dr. Leon McCrea shares his journey to Family Medicine and the FMEC

I feel like this discipline more chose me than I chose it, in that, you know, mentors, colleagues etc. kind of said “Leon this is what you were supposed to do!”

My program director, Dr. Bill Warning, encouraged us to stretch and to consider not only thinking about the care we’re giving to our patients, but also to start to collaborate with other like-minded individuals. He served on the board of this wonderful organization, the FMEC – an organization that really embraced how to get people together and get them energized and thinking about the growth and promotion of family medicine.

You go and you see students and you see residents and you see faculty who are just all excited about doing family medicine. You sit down at a table, and four or five people just sit and come next to you and tell you their stories and want to hear your story! And it just happened again and again and again.

And so, I present a poster at the FMEC meeting. As a resident, you’re juggling all these assignments, and I met the deadline at the last minute – I’m sure it was like 11:59pm, and I’m pushing send to get it submitted. And low and behold, they accept me to come and present! I don’t even remember what the topic was!

But at the FMEC meeting, you go and you see students and you see residents and you see faculty who are just all excited about doing family medicine and creating interesting initiatives and yearning to collaborate. You sit down at a table, and four or five people just sit and come next to you and tell you their stories and want to hear your story! And it just happened again and again and again. and I left thinking, like, what just happened to me? Did I just re-fall in love with family medicine in a way I hadn’t before?

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I’ve been coming ever since and encouraging my residents when I became a residency director, to come . . . to learn and to exchange ideas and to collaborate with future leaders in family medicine.

The other thing that this wonderful organization does is that it is phenomenal training for leadership in medicine. Many people who have been volunteers with the FMEC – helping with our committees or

planning our meeting – have gone on to do amazing things within the field of family medicine. I can think of leaders within the ACGME and in the AAFP, each of whom spent significant time doing work with the FMEC.

And so when I think about this wonderful organization, I think about the fact that it brings together the love for this work. It inspires us in terms of the importance of education and ultimately the care for communities. And we do it in a way that just feels good. And so that is why I’m part of the FMEC, and why I continue to be and hope to be as long as I’m able.



Dr. Pam Vnenchak shares her journey to Family Medicine and the FMEC

I first got involved with the FMEC before it was even officially the FMEC. It was in the early '90s and my program director, Dr. Nick Zervanos (who was instrumental in starting the organization), had this wild idea to host a meeting of the Society Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM), but regionally, and he was going to bring hundreds of students to rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania to talk about family medicine. I was chief resident at the time. I was on the planning committee for the meeting, and I wasn’t really sure what was going on. But the enthusiasm of the faculty and of the leaders! How exciting it was to meet fellow medical students from all over the northeast! And medical students who had an interest in family medicine!

This was where I found other people who shared interests with me. When there were problems that we were trying to solve, the FMEC connected me to other people who had done it. This really became “home.”

When I left residency, I was in private practice for a few years, and then I rediscovered FMEC when I came to academic medicine in upstate New York. This meeting was like the first time I had presented at a conference. This was where I found other people who shared interests with me. When there were problems that we were trying to solve, the FMEC connected me to other people who had done it. And so this really became “home.” I've developed lifelong friendships from this meeting.

Sometimes I come to this meeting, and I'm on top of my game, things are going great in my life, and I'm excited to be presenting. But then there are other times when I'm not feeling good – maybe personally, maybe professionally – and I always leave this meeting feeling better because I find friends and collaborators. As my career has developed, the FMEC has been instrumental in my personal growth. I think the FMEC work has been filling my soul and helping me develop my career along the way.

This is a place where if you have a crazy idea, there's somebody else who shares a similar, passionate interest, and you can collaborate. Sometimes those collaborations last briefly. Other ones that have gone on to be big, big projects. For example, the FMEC was the birthplace of the FACTS project, the IMPLICIT project, and Smiles for Life. Some things from our FMEC meetings have really gone on to have national impact.

For students in particular, the FMEC is a great place to connect with family medicine and explore residency program options. I came from a medical school that didn't have a family medicine department. It was hard for me to connect with other people who had passion for family medicine. The FMEC meeting is that place. The timing of our meeting is terrific – those of you who are fourth year students, you're going to be able to talk with dozens and dozens of residents and faculty. You'll be able to hone down your big list of residency programs, or maybe connect with residency programs that you never would have thought of. Bring your walking shoes when you come to the FMEC meeting!

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Dr. Raj Woolever shares his journey to Family Medicine and the FMEC

I was one of the medical students that attended that very FMEC first meeting – the one that Dr. Vnenchak helped plan as a resident. I went to medical school at the University of Rochester, and I had done some research with one of my mentors, on the primary care of patients with HIV in rural New York. So I was one of the students who came down and presented in Lancaster, Pennsylvania!

I still remember meeting other students and faculty members from the whole region, who were excited about family medicine. It was the first time I had done any kind of a presentation at a meeting, and I was really hooked right from the very beginning.

It's probably the most unabashedly “rah-rah family medicine” meeting that I go to, and it just leaves you with a smile on your face and a new pep in your step when you walk away each year, with new ideas and new energy and new colleagues and new friends and new projects.

I left the northeast for a while, to do residency and some traveling and work with the US Airforce. But I ultimately settled back down in the northeast, and I rediscovered the FMEC. I knew that it was *my* meeting. I go to lots meetings in my role as a program director, but there are none that feel quite the same as the FMEC meeting. It's really the one that has my sort of people, and I'm as excited as others like Dr. Vnenchak to see friends and colleagues, many of whom I met at the FMEC and stay in touch with. I know for sure that I'll see them in person at least once a year at the FMEC annual meeting!

The meeting is small enough that you're going to know almost everybody there pretty quickly, but it's big enough that there are new people coming and new ideas being generated all the time. I would contend that there is no other meeting I go to that has the same energy as the FMEC annual meeting. It's probably the most unabashedly “rah-rah family medicine” meeting that I go to, and it just leaves you with a smile on your face and a new pep in your step when you walk away each year, with new ideas and new energy and new colleagues and new friends and new projects. There's nothing quite like it.

I hope you all discover that same sense of energy and optimism for the future of family medicine, when you join us at an FMEC meeting.